

MINUTES
SNOWMOBILE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
Quality Inn
3290 I-75 Business Spur
Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan
February 26, 2009

Chairman Wheatlake called the meeting of the Snowmobile Advisory Committee (SAC) to order at 8:57 a.m., Thursday, February 26, 2009, in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan.

Members Present:

Frank Wheatlake, Chairman, Business and Community Representative, Reed City
Bill Manson, Region III, Michigan Snowmobile Association (MSA), Grand Rapids
Bill Lucas, Region II, MSA, Cadillac
Orville Olson, Representative at Large, Ludington
Richard Filley, Trail Sponsors Representative, Grayling
Jim Duke, Region I MSA, Munising

Members Absent:

Lee Murray, Member-At-Large, Hopkins

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Anne Okonek, USDA, Hiawatha National Forest

DNR Staff Present:

Stacy Welling, U.P Deputy Director, Marquette
Lynne Boyd, Chief, Forest, Mineral and Fire Management (FMFM), Lansing
Jim Radabaugh, State Trails Coordinator, FMFM, Lansing
Steve DeBrabander, State Trails Unit Manager, FMFM, Lansing
William O'Neill, Lower Peninsula Field Coordinator, FMFM, Gaylord
Loretta Cwalinski, Secretary, FMFM, Gaylord
Lt. Andrew Turner, Law Enforcement Division (LED), Lansing

Mr. Wheatlake introduced himself and welcomed everyone. The Committee, DNR staff and the audience introduced themselves.

MINUTES

The minutes of the December 11, 2008 SAC meeting were acknowledged.

Motion was made by Mr. Duke, seconded by Mr. Manson, to adopt the minutes of the December 11, 2008 meeting. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

OLD BUSINESS

New Trail Sponsor Grooming Equipment Eligibility -- **Mr. Radabaugh** referenced his handout to the Committee as a draft for suggestions/changes.

Mr. Lucas wanted to discuss paragraph two and the concerns with the Thumbs Up Snowmobile Club. He would like to see a period before..."and the snowmobile trail supports the program goal of an interconnected system of trails." Discussion continued.

Mr. Radabaugh said the section could be taken out.

Mr. Manson made a motion, seconded by **Mr. Lucas**, that the sentence in paragraph two of the DRAFT 12/11/2008 New Trail Sponsor & Grooming Equipment Eligibility proposal be modified to read as follows:

To sustain the current trails system and to foster new recreational snowmobile trail growth, a new trail sponsor will be eligible their first year for program support of equipment lease or rental if the trail sponsor fulfills all of the requirements of the snowmobile program.

Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

NEW BUSINESS

Snowmobile Registration and Trail Permit Fee Increase -- **Mr. Manson** reported the fee increase passed and will begin next year. The other piece of legislation was for buying permanent easements. He discussed the challenges for the increase, but there's much more support.

Mr. Wheatlake wanted to clarify the belief that the Department did not support the fee increase, but to be cognizant of the problems that could occur such as lower revenue due to pricing snowmobilers out of activity.

Administrative Rules -- **Mr. Wheatlake** designated Bill Manson and Lee Murray to work with the Department to develop these rules. **Mr. Radabaugh** said it could take one year, and there are several steps and other state agencies involved. They must do rule-making with the final decision going to the legislature. These rules would be for how the fund for the acquisition of permanent trails would be administered.

Mr. Wheatlake would like an update on that progress.

SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

Equipment Lease Sub-Committee Status -- **Mr. DeBrabander** said the workgroup met earlier this week to discuss the feasibility of leasing equipment. They developed a draft process of fact finding, comparing specifications and gathering that information for comparison and discussion. The group did not mention a timeline, but should have responses within 60 days.

Mr. Manson noted it was a good conference call, and the discussion was thorough and productive.

Mr. Olson said he was also pleased and thought that by April there could be some conclusions made.

Mr. Filley asked if we were heading out of the purchasing arena. **Mr. DeBrabander** explained that is what the workgroup is working on, but there will probably be a combination of leases and purchases for whatever fits the best. **Mr. Olson** added that there are three possibilities that would include lease with option to buy.

Equipment Evaluation/Replacement Sub-Committee Status -- **Mr. Filley** said there had been no contact to discuss that yet.

STAFF REPORTS

Grooming Contract Update -- **Mr. DeBrabander** said that so far the process is moving along smoothly in the Gaylord trail system and reports are the trails are in good shape. They will be doing a thorough analysis of the whole process, but it seems to be working out well.

Mr. Lucas said he has ridden the trail a few times but wanted the sponsor group to go to the loop to the motels and hotels on the east side of I-75.

Mr. Manson asked for a copy of the contract, and **Mr. DeBrabander** said he thought he had e-mailed that, but will make sure Mr. Manson gets it. Several members of SAC indicated they had received it by email from Mr. DeBrabander.

Mr. Wheatlake asked about going into communities to groom.

Mr. Radabaugh said it's not statutory but there are local contacts and clubs that agree on what will be groomed. He said that about 25% of their total grooming miles are for those local business spurs. The discussion continued.

Extended Warranty Update (100% program funded equipment) -- **Mr. DeBrabander** stated a letter was mailed to all the clubs that had 100% program funded equipment indicating the program would fund extended warranties. The Department has funded all extended warranty requests received. Major repair on 100% program funded equipment that has an expired warranty will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Snowmobile Trail Sign Press Release -- **Mr. DeBrabander** reported that a request from SAC generated a press release in late December that addressed sign damage. The release was picked up by local newspapers and some television stations. MSA also put it on their website.

Mr. Manson asked if signs with sponsor's name could be placed on the trail to indicate who is maintaining the trail. He stated this would be a display of pride for the various clubs as well as inform the riding public as to who is maintaining the trail.

Mr. Radabaugh said yes that can be done, and that information will be added to the sign manual. All clubs must put up their own signs at the various entry points to the trail.

Mr. DeBrabander said the snowmobile trail maps will be downloadable to GPS handheld units by the beginning of the next snowmobile season. They will be on the DNR's website at www.michigan.gov/dnr.

Ms. Welling, DNR UP Field Deputy introduced herself and will be sitting in on today's meeting.

January Snowmobile Trail Permit Sales -- **Mr. Radabaugh** distributed a handout with comparisons from last year to this year. He noted an increase in permit sales.

US Forest Service - Ms. Okonek, USDA, Hiawatha National Forest talked about the economic stimulus package and that Doty Bridge will be one of those submitted to be repaired. Also they have requests in for ORV funding to repair snowmobile trails that have been damaged by ORV use, particularly in Delta County. They have found it difficult to keep ORV's off; fences have not worked. She's open to hear any suggestions that would work. They are undergoing a comprehensive review to move the snowmobile trails out of the wetlands and onto the road systems, and implement it in 2010. Hiawatha National Forest requested Haywire and Coalwood grades be designated as State ORV routes. These are also snowmobile trails. There are two different policies there that need to be remedied - she asked if both snowmobile and ORV users on the trails and the conflicts that arise have been discussed.

Mr. Manson said it has been discussed in the past, mid to late 90s, but there were not enough concerns at that time noted on the snowmobile trails.

Ms. Okonek related a personal incident on a snowmobile trail in the UP after encountering ORV riders that had been tearing up the trail. There are no actual laws in place to remedy winter use by ORV's and legally there is nothing preventing ORV's on the groomed trails.

Mr. Manson said they have not seen enough problems yet to really look into it again. Some areas are worse than others, especially in the UP since ORV's have very few restrictions there.

Mr. Wheatlake said those issues should be addressed, and involve MSA and USFS in those discussions.

Mr. Radabaugh suggested discussing it at the ORV Advisory Board meeting.

Mr. Wheatlake wants it on the agenda for the next couple SAC meetings as well.

Law Enforcement -- **Lt. Turner** said there have been 13 fatalities so far this season. He will continue with updates. He also addressed the safety training and availability – there has been a shift recently in responsibilities within the Department, but they are looking into other programs to recruit over to snowmobile from the several thousand hunter safety instructors. He also discussed grant program availability. Their thought was to require safety training to the counties that get grants.

Mr. Manson recommended to have MSA assist in training the trainers again as it was years ago.

Lt. Turner said there really isn't the available staff any longer, let alone funding. He said support would be good, but funding is an issue.

Ms. Boyd said that maybe there should be workshops once a year or so.

Lt. Turner explained the process on how to qualify as an instructor, which is quite minimal through an application, testing and background check.

Mr. Wheatlake said that we should be able to afford a day class for instructors.

Mr. Manson added that there were actually three more fatalities over the weekend that he was made aware of.

Mr. Olson said that in 1999 they were given a grant to put a handbook together. He feels it's time to update it and have it ready for the next snow season. He set up a grooming schedule and maintenance schedule and wants to update that as well. Discussion continued over handbooks and the need for updating. **Mr. Wheatlake** asked Mr. Olson to work on that with Mr. Filley to assist.

Mr. Wheatlake asked about the Grand Marais trail and if trails are groomed during the day and if there are problems with that.

Mr. Manson said that it's best to groom twice in any segment on any given day. He added it's just a product of heavy use – but the daytime grooming was to work down the moguls and make it smoother for the second grooming.

Mr. DeBrabander said a process has evolved such that when MSA receives a complaint about a snowmobile trail it is forwarded to him and he contacts local Department staff to investigate. **Mr. DeBrabander** then provides feedback to the MSA on the results of the investigation into the complaint. Discussion continued.

Mr. Wheatlake asked for comments from the committee on sponsors, complaints and every aspect of the program.

Mr. Lucas said overall it has definitely improved.

Mr. Filley said overall moving forward, no complaints.

Mr. Olson said that he feels there's overall improvement and it seems there's more teamwork, and feels it's succeeding.

Mr. Duke said that he tries to communicate with the snowmobilers, and over the last year feels they are on the road to recovery.

Mr. Manson said he is glad that Mr. Wheatlake has taken over as chair. He said he's also glad to see Ms. Boyd and the Department folks here, and feels they are moving forward. He complimented Mr. DeBrabander specifically as well and said he's done very good work with the program.

Ms. Boyd said she feels that there is a far less amount of confrontation and is very pleased on how the relationship is going.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Al Green, Cadillac Winter Promotions had a question about the Department purchasing before leasing approval. **Mr. DeBrabander** said the Department is still considering all options and purchasing equipment is still an option.

Mr. Larry Marzean, Alpena Snow Association wanted to personally thank staff for their quick response to the club's equipment breakdown – they have moved forward with their equipment exchange. He also had a recurring question that had not been answered about the trail he thought was damaged by ORV's.

Mr. O'Neill responded that the field contact did get back to their club with those answers. The club was notified in the summer before the heavy equipment was to place the boulders (to prevent further ORV usage and damage). At that time the ground was far too wet and the semi did more resource damage than was acceptable. The decision was made to wait until winter when the ground was frozen to place the boulders, and again the club was notified beforehand.

Mr. Rick Brown, MSA asked if the insurance issue in Gaylord was ever taken care of. The groomer verified that he is all covered with the necessary insurance, and has had that insurance for the last three years.

Mr. DeBrabander said the Gaylord club has a grant with the program, and has kept permissions with private property owners, and has private landowners listed as additional insured on their club's insurance.

Mr. Rod Altman, Presque Isle Snow Trails said that the safety handbook is not made for Michigan and it is very outdated.

Lt. Turner said that he would like to invite Mr. Dennis Fox to these meetings, and get a discussion moving forward on updating the handbook. He added that there are portions specific to Michigan, but much of it is generic.

Mr. Jim Dingman, MSA and Trailriders, Baldwin said that he would like to see a law that wheeled motor vehicles be disallowed from riding the trails during the official snowmobile season.

Mr. Wheatlake asked for it to be an agenda item and look into what needs to be done. Staff will work with the ORV Board and LED.

Mr. Don Carrol, Ogemaw Hills Snow Club said Marl Lake has not received any information on trail numbers to order for the four mile section signage.

Mr. DeBrabander promised to get back with him next week.

Mr. Dingman said that the Manistee National Forest has a situation of concern on M-20 at a staging area; the Forest Service got a grant from the DNR for asphalt, then it became an area that was not going to be a staging area any longer according to the USFS.

Ms. Okonek said she will have someone with USFS get with Mr. Dingman.

Mr. Wheatlake concluded that the ORV, SAC and USFS need to get together for a meeting this summer.

Mr. Radabaugh suggested looking at their meeting dates and see if something coincides, and gather at a central location.

Mr. Green had photos of signs and information on their peeling signs. There were 373 signs replaced in a two month time period. Not only the cost is a concern, but the labor to change out all those signs needs a look at. He is asking that when the next sign contract comes out, a performance clause, and perhaps a warranty date be considered.

Mr. DeBrabander said there is a performance clause, and year of manufacture is something that can be looked into.

Mr. Bob Humpert, Ogemaw Hills Snow Club asked about the Lupton Trail Connector; their group has applied for brushing and signing, but has not heard anything back on it. He applied in November. This was a new proposal.

Mr. DeBrabander said he would check on the status and get back with Mr. Humpert. He reminded meeting attendees that on the website there is an updated list of trail proposals with status of where they are in the process. Go to the DNR's website at www.michigan.gov/dnr, click on the "Recreation, Camping & Boating" link, then "Snowmobiling", and then "Trail Sponsors" link. This database is for all trails.

Mr. John Houk, P.I. & NE MI Council asked about the Black Mountain reroute - DEQ was involved and they had public comment, so he was wondering about the status on that trail and also on the Carmoos trail.

Mr. O'Neill will get with John Arevalo, DEQ District Supervisor and check for any public comment on the Black Mountain reroute. He will get back with Mr. Houk.

In regards to the Carmoos trail, **Mr. DeBrabander** said when the snow melts they will get together and go to the site to check the area. Mr. Houk said he would like to go along.

Ms. Kaye Houk, P.I. & NE MI Council wondered if there could be any consistency on signage and the size of signs as they can be very confusing.

Mr. DeBrabander said this has been looked into, and recently discussed the consistency concerns. The recommendation has been to combine signs whenever possible and to reduce the number of signs. This was taken to the Office of Litigation and they approved. Combining signs between the two motorized trail programs will be discussed at the Advisory Boards/Committees for both programs in the near future.

Mr. Don Brelsford, Snowchasers said that special maintenance needs should be looked at, as it is costing the sponsors too much money.

Mr. Tom Gallagher, MSA brought in signs that have been up for years, and the Department had asked them to be removed. He is wondering why their contact person wanted one of their two signs down that mentioned free coffee at their clubhouse.

Mr. DeBrabander said there's no advertising allowed, and once you open the door for any advertising, it opens the door to potential abuse.

Mr. Manson wanted to make the recommendation that advertising a club house is fine, but not advertising one with coffee.

Ms. Boyd agreed with the club name on the signs and the hours of operation.

Ms. Okonek said they allow advertising for businesses with a special use permit. They do have a number of areas that have advertising but must have the permit. The fees are not cheap - \$50 per year per sign, along with an initial fee.

Mr. Keith Litchfield, Bader & Sons spoke about meeting to discuss the leasing options and trying to come up with basic guidelines and numbers for the best, most cost effective opportunities. He asked how an additional piece of equipment could be handled, such as a CD player.

Mr. DeBrabander said that at the clubs expense they could buy the extra equipment that is beyond that necessary to groom trails, but if it is not able to be removed, the equipment and potential worth would stay with the equipment and the program.

Mr. Wheatlake said that needs to be clarified for sure.

Mr. Houk asked about the equipment that is not 100% funded. He feels the equipment could end up worthless when major repairs are needed.

Mr. DeBrabander said program funding of equipment repairs on less than 100% funded equipment will be handled as indicated in the Handbook. Any exception requests will be evaluated on a case by case basis considering all the variables.

Mr. Jim Dickie, Mid-Michigan Council said they do have a report section on their website and encourage grant sponsors to use that website and update trail conditions. This is linked to the DNR website as well.

Mr. Herb Lawson, Presque Isle Sno Trails mentioned a trail he was recently on that dead ends in Rapid River, then dead ends in Escanaba. They finally got directions from DNR staff about 30 miles out of town, but the signs there need to be updated.

Ms. Okonek said they have been working on a bridge over the Whitefish River, but lack of funding and other factors have been the challenge. For clarification on the Rapid River/Escanaba trail section - the map shows that the trail does end.

NEXT MEETING

The next SAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 23, 2009 in Gaylord, Michigan at the Best Western/Alpine Inn. (PLEASE NOTE – THE APRIL 23, 2009 MEETING WAS CANCELLED. THE NEXT MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR 10:00AM, JUNE 16, 2009 AT BJ's RESTAURANT IN GAYLORD)

The meeting adjourned at 11:46 a.m.

Public Present:

Keith Litchfield, Bader & Sons
Don Carroll, Ogemaw Hills Snow Club
Don Reed, Seney Snow Assoc; MSA
Bill Steegenga, Bader & Sons
John Houk, P.I. & NE MI Council
Kaye Houk, P.I. & NE MI Council
Karen Middendorp, MSA
Jim Dickie, Mid-MI Council
Dave Becker, St Helen SnowPackers
Al Green, Cadillac Winter Promotions
Jim Conley, Allegan Snowmobile Club
Don Wiley, Allegan Snowmobile Club
Donald Brelsford, Chippewa Snow Chasers
Edwin A. Carlson, Chippewa Snow Chasers
Jim Dingman, Trailriders - Baldwin
Bud Longroy, St. Helen Sno Packers

Dale Vagts, V & V Insurance
Rick Brown, MSA
Larry Marzean, Alpena Snow Assoc
Bob Humpert, Ogemaw Hills Snow Club
Jake Barter, St. Helen Snowpackers
Tom Gallagher, MSA
Marcia Kelley, St. Helen Snowpackers
Mary Ann Longroy, St. Helen Snowpackers
Carl Telletsen, St. Helen Snowpackers
Ed McHugh, St. Helen Snowpackers
Laverne Longroy, Ogemaw Hills Sno Club
Herb Lawson, PIST
Roland Rieger, PI Snow Trails
Rodney Altman, PI Snow Trails
Barry Bethke, Jordan Valley Trails Council